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ABSTRACT

The Cooperative Information Network (CIN) was formed in 1972 to respond as totally as possible to the informational needs of individuals, governmental units, and businesses located within Santa Clara County, California. A network of TWX machines links all types of libraries in the county. Libraries joining the system agree to respond as quickly as possible to queries from other libraries. Products of the system include a membership directory listing special resources of each library, workshops on using the service, and an intern program for interchange of library staffs. Three more libraries have joined the network, forming a prototypical link of what could be a state library network. (Author/PF)

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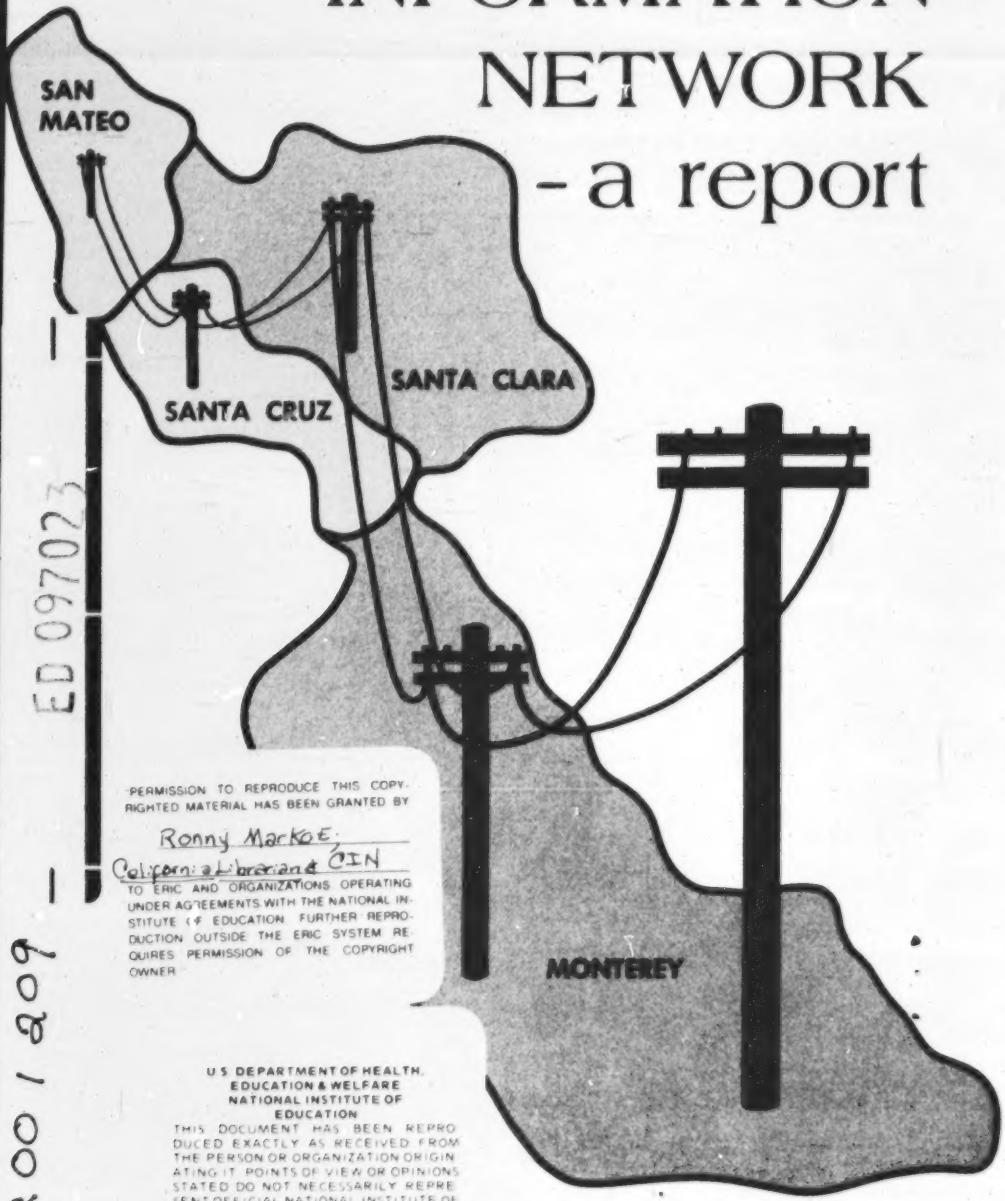
THE COOPERATIVE INFORMATION NETWORK - a report



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Then, back in 1972, the librarians of Santa Clara County agreed to accept CIN as the working acronym for their proposed information network (Cooperative Information Network), it was not only with a sense of waggishness but with the genuine conviction that the time had come to breathe life into the concept. Mutual agreement, by the librarian-activists involved, that the informational needs of the community were not being met had been the motivating factor for the sporadic two-year span of meetings. The overall goal for CIN was, and remains, the development of a network of communications among *all* types of libraries. Our avowed purpose: to respond as totally as possible to the informational needs of individuals, government units and businesses located within Santa Clara County.

With this goal in mind, telecommunication between libraries in the form of TWX machines seemed the desirable course of action; a technological round-robin which would enhance and improve reference referrals. This decision to install teletype equipment had been made at the expense of other options which had been advanced toward expanding the dimension of library response and flexibility in services . . . techniques for interlibrary loan, telefacsimile services, joint storage facility for seldom used materials, Union Catalog of library resources, joint public relations and publicity promotion . . . and more. There were varying levels of enthusiasm for all suggestions. One consensus, however, overrode the others — that a communication network was our primary need.

CIN's official existence began in July 1972 with a grant under Title III of LSCA. A part-time coordinator was employed to work closely with an elected Board of Directors and headquarters were established in the Main Library of Stanford University.

Preparation of a membership directory, to include details on local library collections, was the first order of business. Obviously the yield from a resource-sharing network depends, in part, on what resources reside in the participating libraries waiting to be tallied and tapped. In Santa Clara County the information riches are among the most diverse and comprehensive in the state: three universities (Stanford University, University of Santa Clara, San Jose State University); eight sizeable public libraries (including San Jose Public Library); five burgeoning community colleges; scores of school and media libraries, plus the vast scientific collections in such special libraries as IBM, Lockheed, NASA, General Electric, Hewlett-Packard. These were all willing participants, committed to the concept of cooperation in resource-sharing. Call it the pragmatic solution to today's information explosion . . . the resolve was to respond to each other.

To facilitate this the bulk of the funding was spent on installing seven TWX machines, strategically placed to augment those existing teletype machines being funded by the two public library systems, Camino Real and Santa Clara County. Within two months, CIN member libraries received the first compilation of a membership directory which attempted to enumerate special collections, subject strengths and contact people. In sequence came the keyed-in subject index and a *Manual of Operations*.

During the first year, the Board of Directors met monthly to direct the Network operation and confer with the coordinator. By year's end, adjoining San Mateo County had decided to join forces with CIN, and plans for a joint funding application for the two counties were underway. Upon the awarding of that grant from federal funds (LSCA, Title III), San Mateo elected its own Board of Directors and began meeting together with the members from Santa Clara County as a single Board.

Now, more than two years in existence, the Network has been further strengthened by the addition of both Santa Cruz and Monterey counties, an implementation of the geographical *Master Plan for California Library Networks*. In looking back, we see the steady progress in the linking of resources to form an increasingly important chain of communications so essential in these days of growing needs and diminished budgets. It is painfully clear than no library or group of libraries is its own wellspring — nor can aspire to be.

That, in brief, is the history of CIN. But more important is what we have accomplished in these two years and what we have learned.

In the beginning . . .

When asked to become members of CIN, few libraries turned down the opportunity to join. It is clear that everyone gains in a Network relationship if for no other reason than the access afforded to vast stores of information, materials and talents. Additionally, CIN imposes no rules on member libraries. Normal library routines continue without intrusion or change. We ask only that member libraries respond to each other to the best of their ability and as quickly as possible. Hopefully, within 24 hours.

In only a few instances were libraries reluctant to join. One librarian of a private museum felt that their information, though by no means classified, was strictly for the use of their membership. Some small libraries, essentially one-person operations, expressed fear that joining might bring with it extra tasks. These are needless anxieties, however. Small libraries have perhaps the most to gain and the least to fear. It is the rare question indeed that winds up at the door of a small one-person library.

One last category of reluctant libraries was hospital or health center libraries. It was their concern, in some instances, that matters of protocol with regard to medical reference might be violated. This is, again, a needless fear, as the Network does not impinge on a library's rules regarding its own sense of responsiblity. Furthermore, Stanford Medical Center's Lane Library led a CIN-sponsored seminar recently and its forward-thinking director and chief of reference offered positive leadership on overcoming the taboos and prohibitions which have in the past hindered the offering of medical reference to lay people. In their view, medical questions should not be disallowed or proscribed by professionals making subjective judgements, but should be treated exactly as any other information request.

During our two years of operation, we have learned a great deal about each other, both on a professional and on a personal level. Perhaps the most salient piece of information is the reaffirmation of an old truism: in any situation in which there is human interaction, people, not procedures or equipment, are the important ingredient. No set of rules or benefits, no matter the logic or usefulness, will work unless the people involved *choose* to make them work. As in any other phase of life dealing with new ideas, there are the activists who are ready to take part, and the resisters who like things the way they are and will brook no change. In between are all levels of involvement, but especially important, in the beginning, are those who wish to see it succeed.

In our case, we had enough commitment to start us off and to see us through the first year. Then, whether it was a learning curve of usage, whether a ripening sense of comfort under the CIN superstructure or whether the times were simply right for a large multi-library cooperative effort, commitment and enthusiasm began to build.

We set several projects in motion, in addition to the original and ongoing promotion of reference referral via the

many TWXs placed throughout the two counties. One was a series of small workshops in which enrollment was limited to approximately twenty participants. These round table discussions on how to take queries through network channels took on the informality so essential for true interaction and the triumph of "real questions" over rhetorical one-upmanship. These small, informal sessions were unqualifiedly more useful than the large audience-oriented type of workshops which we had held during the first year.

To learn more about each other, our collections, and our mutual or individual problems, an internship project was offered to the membership. In this experiment, CIN sponsored and arranged for three-day apprentice stints by librarians in requested library settings. The response was excellent, both on the part of those libraries who were asked to accept an intern and on the part of the participants — forty in all. The logistics worked out well and, for the most part, we were able to match request with placement. Some libraries chose to absorb the cost involved of hiring replacements; in other instances, CIN paid the cost. Few libraries declined to host an intern, and in several cases hosted as many as two and three on different dates. Intern-librarians were asked to compile a brief report of the highlights of their "field work." Theirs was an almost universal enthusiasm about the stimulation involved and the learning experience. After a general tour of the host libraries, the interns spent their time searching collections, observing problems, procedures, patrons, reference questions and staff. They were there to receive a firsthand working knowledge of another library. Most were given the chance to work at problems as well and all seemed to agree that the experience extended their professional horizons and established strong bonds of personal relationships — a bonus which cannot be overemphasized in a resource-sharing project. Curiously, reading the interns' impressions of their libraries turned it into a learning experience for some of the host libraries as well.

Still another project was the Saturday Seminars which dealt with subjects most requested by the membership: Medicine, Business and Law. Any librarian from a CIN member library was eligible to participate and attendance and interest were high throughout the six-week period. Both the Business Seminar, held at Stanford's School of Business and the Medical Seminar, at Stanford's Medical Center, were three-hour sessions and both reached their 60-seat capacity quickly. The Law Seminar was divided into three 3-hour sessions and had a top limit of forty persons, easily met. Becoming acquainted with the latest in available subject materials, learning more about the poten-

tialities, as well as limitations, of reference in these fields, and renewing personal relationships with fellow librarians were a few of the more obvious benefits.

Adding to our ability to expand our reference services, the National Science Foundation has funded a proposal by Lockheed for the experimental use of the DIALOG computer retrieval project in four public libraries of the Network. In Santa Clara County, terminals have been located in the San Jose Public Library and in the Cupertino branch of the Santa Clara County Library System; additionally the headquarters branch of San Mateo County Library (Belmont) and the Redwood City Public Library will have terminals. This project will offer the general public immediate access to four million references and abstracts of articles in a wide variety of educational, scientific, agricultural and business fields of interest. Thus, a teacher or social worker will be able to locate references on techniques for dealing with learning disabilities, an engineer to locate references on testing integrated circuit chips, and a businessman to find references on new planning and budgeting techniques through a simple "conversation" with the computer. Fall 1974 should see the service in full operation.

In addition to the CIN manual and the membership directory, both of which had to be revised to reflect CIN expansion, we have issued various publications designed to help promote use of the Network: brochures were distributed widely and were oriented as giveaways to the public at large; also compilations, such as the sixteen-page list of publications produced by member libraries, *Union Lists of Serials*, as well as a *Union List of Indices and Abstracts* (just completed). In the non-print area, a CIN slide/tape show was produced with the talents of librarians and technicians from member library De Anza College. It dealt with networks on a conceptual level and then, more specifically, with the workings of CIN itself. Currently, an A/V inservice training project is nearing completion dealing with the subject of how to "network" a query. Multiple copies will be produced and made available to all member libraries. Its purpose: to help promote use of the Network by permitting small group viewing sessions and interaction thereafter; to help treat the ongoing problem of personnel turn-over; to affirm already-established use by using the film as a focal point for further discussion of ways to handle arising problems.

One of the most positive aspects of all programs sponsored by the Network is a sense of pulling together; special librarians joining with academic librarians, meeting with public librarians . . . It is a productive, visionary current whose time is at hand.

Two of the major problems that CIN faces are promoting awareness and use of the Network, and evaluating the results. Apathy or indifference remains a major hurdle in promoting the dynamics of usage. There is a wide band of apathy which cuts a swath through the professional library cadre and out to the general public and to the government units and businesses who could benefit from the information now so much more readily available. Overcoming that apathy required professional promotion. It cannot be left as the short straw selected by an unwilling librarian. We must get out and play the pitchman's role while at the same time continuing to stress the role of individual participation by each librarian. An example of each, in our brief existence, comes to mind to strengthen that resolve. During our first year of operation we allocated certain monies toward obtaining professional help in advertising our informational wares. Posters, large and small, were produced and distributed widely; radio announcements and spots were also produced and were played on public service time over local stations for a period of several

months. It was a worthy effort but was it worthwhile? My reaction is positive if only because we recognized officially that promotion and advertising are skills which libraries *must* use if indeed our *own* library skills are to be used to *their* fullest. More visible evidence of the role individual librarians can play in promoting libraries was displayed by the example of the Redwood City librarian, Karl Vollmayer, who took it upon himself to call up different county seat officials to explain the great possibilities for their information needs of the latest search service at his library, DIALOG. One such search for information by Port officials which had been batted around unsuccessfully concerned the problem of how to make use of certain equipment (In this case, pneumatic tubing) which had been sitting unused and abandoned since the demise of a cement company some years ago. The Port was looking for a buyer or a user. In order to do that intelligently, they needed answers on how to adapt cement-moving machinery . . . Specifically, how to move sulphur in pneumatic tubes (If, indeed, it was possible). The happy ending to this story lies not in the answer (negative) but in the demonstration to city officials of the practical use of libraries (right down at the greenback level), and the speed with which they had resolved a problem which had been plaguing them. Currently, the library is researching for other city officials a variety of questions such as the possible health hazards in using plastic piping for the conveyance of city drinking water. It took individual commitment combined with aggressive action to bring that all about.

How does one judge the "usefulness" of a library network? Is the value of a credit or insurance plan based only on the number of times you use it or on the comforting knowledge that it exists if you need it? Can a network be evaluated statistically? What are network statistics anyway? Is it all the little pencil scratches made by reference librarians of member libraries each time they're asked a question? Only those questions which require a library to transcend its own collection for an answer? Or only those questions which transcend the collections of an existing library system? Must the questions have fishtailed their way through multi-type libraries to qualify as Network statistics? Are "normal transactions" between member libraries disqualified because such transactions existed before the Network came into being? What of the strengthening and reaffirmation of transactions between libraries as a result of their mutual participation in a larger reference umbrella which has enabled them to become more familiar with each other and each other's collections?

The School of Librarianship of a local university will shortly attempt to take on the problem of evaluating usage and the questions just posed will inevitably arise. My own reaction is that we should count *all* questions by *all* member libraries as reflections of the larger cooperative effort which CIN represents. The irrefutable logic of resource-sharing and continued sponsorship should not be contingent on whether we can isolate singular statistics which "prove" our worth; or indeed whether two libraries might have called each other anyway, with or without CIN.

In the next year, we hope to unify the four participating counties into a prototypical link in the chain of what hopefully, one day, will be a state-wide network to create a strong example of modular building blocks for this network growth. To do this will require the active participation of many committed librarians so that our set-up serves not only the state plan, on a long-range basis, but continues to satisfy and serve our primary function — improved reference and library service to any library patron within the four-member counties.

RONNY MARKOE
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